



June 12, 2017

The Honorable Jeffrey B. Barton
Presiding Judge of the San Diego Superior Court
Main Courthouse
220 W. Broadway, 3rd Floor
San Diego, CA 92101

Re: *City of Escondido's Response to the San Diego County Grand Jury Report
"The Escondido Public Library"*

Dear Hon. Judge Barton:

Please allow this letter to constitute the written response of the City of Escondido ("City") to the Report by the 2016/2017 San Diego County Grand Jury ("Report") dated and released to the public on March 21, 2017, entitled, "The Escondido Public Library." The City appreciates the Jury's interest in examining important public services.

Pursuant to California Penal Code § 933(c), the undersigned signatories on behalf of the City have reviewed and considered the Report and respectfully submit the following responses to the Jury's fact findings and recommendations.

Findings

Finding 01: The Escondido Library facility inadequately serves the community.

City Response to Finding 01: The City disagrees partially with the finding.

The City acknowledges that the Escondido Public Library has limited space to conduct large or numerous programs or to provide individual study areas for community use.

However, the Report states that "[l]ibrary statistics indicate a downward trend in total registered users, circulation, and public use of internet computers." While true, the Report fails to acknowledge that these statistics reflect trends impacting libraries nationwide. For example, on page 6 of the Report, the definition of "public use of internet computers" does not account for the use of personal electronic devices on the Library's high-speed wireless connection. In fact, use of wired, desktop computers increased 3.3 percent in 2016. Moreover, statistics gathered by the City from May through December of 2016 indicate that wireless network use accounts for 64.9 percent of all public computing in the library. Further, the decline in "total registered users" of the computers is a reflection of the City's purposeful decision to remove inactive users from the patron database.

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Therefore, the decline in total registered users, circulation, and public use of internet computers does not necessarily mean that the Library facility is "inadequate to serve the community."

Finding 02: The Escondido library's programs do not meet the community needs.

City Response to Finding No. 02: The City disagrees partially with the finding.

The City would respectfully submit that the finding that "library programs do not meet community needs" is a conclusion not necessarily supported by a fair assessment of all relevant facts. Program attendance and participant feedback reflect certain levels of service. The 2016 Escondido Public Library Statistical Report survey showed that the Library is widely used with four out of five respondents having visited the Library in the last five years.

It is true that the number of programs hosted decreased 24 percent in 2016, however, attendance at those events decreased by only 4.4 percent. The incongruence of the numbers could suggest that the programs are of high quality and the staff time to plan and implement the programs, together with the marketing of each program, may be more effective than in previous years.

The following is a brief overview of the quality programs and services the Library has provided for the community:

- 1 gbps Broadband internet service (upgraded from 50 mbps)
- Enhanced wireless internet service for use with personal electronic devices or Chromebooks circulated by Library staff
- Chromebook Lending Library for in-Library use
- Community Room reservation opportunities of a 2,100 s.f. meeting space
- Virtual Library with authenticated online electronic research resources for children, teens and adults (databases)
- Downloadable eBooks and eAudiobooks
- Downloadable *Zinio* full-text eMagazine database
- Online access to digitized photos and historic records from the Pioneer Room local history archive
- An annual monthly concert series
- Monthly book club discussion meetings for adults, teens, and children, including a bilingual group
- Monthly Writers Group for adults
- Weekly story time programs to support early literacy development for babies, toddlers, preschool, and pre-K children
- Weekly Chess Club meetings for children ages 6-12
- Monthly teen events, including a Teen Advisory Board and opportunities for teens to earn community service

- Special events for adults and youth that celebrate holidays, cultural milestones, and Escondido's history
- Special programs such as financial literacy, a Scrabble-thon Tournament & Fundraiser, author speaking engagements, lectures, and community-related interests, such as water-wise landscape design
- Annual campaigns for Library Card Sign-Up month with events such as *Read Local*, *Shop Local*, a partnership with downtown Escondido businesses
- National Library Week celebrations which is extended throughout the month of April
- Annual *Summer Reading Challenge* specifically designed for age groups and reading levels targeting adults, teens, and children
- Annual *Food for Fines* drive in partnership with Interfaith Community Services
- Monthly Friends of the Library used book sales
- Annual recognition events, such as the Library's Annual Volunteer Luncheon and Literacy Learner Recognition appreciation
- Outreach services that include school visits to local public and private K-12 schools, preschools, and partnerships with local organizations including the Chamber of Commerce; California Center for the Arts, Escondido; San Diego Children's Discovery Museum; Interfaith Community Services; Cruisin' Grand; the Escondido Arts Partnership; and many of the City's departments

It appears that the Report bases its conclusion about the quality of the Library's programs on the number of programs provided, however, quantity does not equal quality. Nevertheless, lack of program space and a reduction in staff who plan and implement programs account for a decrease in the number of programs hosted. The City believes there is room for improvement and that the number of programs and the community attendance rate should increase.

Finding 03: Unused allocated funds from the Escondido Library operating budget are not used to benefit the library.

City Response to Finding 03: The City disagrees partially with the finding.

The Report bases this finding, in part, on the fact that "[w]hen library operating income exceeds expenditures, the unused allocated portion remains in the City's General fund." As a routine City practice for all City departments, unspent allocated annual operating funds are not returned to City departments for future use. This fact is not unique to the Library nor is the general budget practice unique to the City of Escondido.

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However, with the exception of the General Fund budget, the Capital Improvement Program allocations and all of the Library's Trust Fund allocated accounts are rolled-over to the next fiscal year if the funds have not been expended.

Finding 04: An effective marketing plan is not being employed to attract more people to the library's resources, programs, and activities.

City Response to Finding 04: The City disagrees with the finding.

The Report acknowledges that the City publishes brochures, ads and press releases, but also states as a "Fact" that the "Escondido Library does not have a marketing plan." This finding is not supported by a fair assessment of the relevant facts related to the Library's efforts to market its services to the public.

In fact, the Library has in place extensive, prescribed marketing plans and workflows for event publicity. A Program Planning Committee (comprised of key staff assigned to plan, implement, promote, and publicize Library programs) coordinates the development and execution of program-specific timelines and procedures related to graphics, news releases, scheduling, and implementation details required for the planning and execution of every program conducted by the Library.

A Social Media Team focuses exclusively on the digital marketing of Library programs and services with planned daily and weekly features on the following social media networks targeted to specific audiences: Facebook, Instagram, Tumblr, Pinterest, and Twitter.

Library programs and services are advertised through the following means:

- Monthly print calendar available in-Library, at local businesses, and on the Library's website
- News releases posted on the City and Library websites and widely featured by local newspapers - 88 news releases were published in 2016 (as a point of comparison, Oceanside Public Library published 61 news releases in 2016)
- Library website slideshows and RSS event feeds
- Monthly email newsletters that include a general eNewsletter distributed to 13,859 readers as well as special interest newsletters issued by Literacy Services and Teen Services
- Library programs and services are regularly featured on the following websites:
 - City of Escondido's news release webpage
 - Mayor's Letter on the City's homepage
 - Visit Escondido website
 - EventBrite
- CityTalk, the City of Escondido's monthly employee newsletter

- Street banners
- Lexus Centre digital display board off I-15
- City of Escondido Recreation Guide (distribution of more than 100,000)
- City of Escondido water bill inserts
- Escondido Magazine (Chamber of Commerce)
- Neighborhood Services eNewsletter
- Flat panel monitors throughout the Library feature a rotating display of digital ads for Library services
- Flyers distributed to local school districts both in digital and in print formats
- Participation at community events such as Cruisin' Grand, street fairs, back-to-school nights, Educator's Night Out, and Recreation's Summer Kick-off event

Recommendations

Recommendation 17-08: Review methods of increasing the number of library programs by the end of the next budget cycle.

City Response to Recommendation 17-08: Recommendation has been implemented.

The City has already implemented a review of methods for increasing the number of library programs by the end of the next budget cycle.

1. **Potential for New Library.**

The City acknowledges that the limited space in the existing library may prevent the City from increasing the number of programs. The City is already evaluating options to construct a new library. According to the results of a survey conducted in December 2015 on the perceptions and attitudes of the Escondido community regarding the Escondido Public Library, 68 percent of the respondents said they would support a \$50 million bond to fund improvements to the Library.

In October of 2016, the City conducted a feasibility study which concluded that construction of a new library was feasible and the City Council directed the City Manager to prepare a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) from firms that specialize in public-private partnerships to develop plans for a potential new library. Construction of a new library is also a part of the current 2017-2018 Draft City Council Action Plan.

There are numerous factors associated with undertaking a bond offering to obtain sufficient funding for this effort and estimating in good faith a time frame to complete the process at this time is not possible.

2. Potential Outsourcing of Library Services.

The City is actively reviewing methods to improve the Library's efficiency and the service quality in the near term. In support of these goals, the City has engaged in discussions and negotiations with Library Systems & Services, Inc. ("LS&S") to manage and operate the City's Library system. LS&S is a professional service firm which provides consulting and operational expertise to local governments to assist in developing and enhancing Library collections, programs and technology to help fulfill educational and vocational needs of the local communities.

As noted above, this effort is underway.

Recommendation 17-09: Consider creating a subcommittee to investigate methods of improving their marketing plan for the library by the end of the next budget cycle.

City Response to Recommendation 17-09: Recommendation requires further analysis.

Although the Library already has in place prescribed marketing plans and workflows for event publicity, including in 2016, 24,987 pieces of program-specific distributed marketing materials, the outsourcing of Library services to LS&S will allow for a new review of marketing plans for library programs.

This consideration of LS&S is currently underway and it is anticipated that the City could make a decision on this proposal within six (6) months.

Recommendation 17-10: Investigate methods of dedicating, by the end of the next budget cycle, a portion of any excess funds from money allocated but not spent in the library budget to a special or existing fund to benefit the library.

City Response to Recommendation 17-10: This recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or not reasonable.

As noted above, it is a City-wide policy that unspent allocated annual operating funds are not carried over by departments to the next fiscal year. However, Capital Improvement Program allocations and all of the Library's Trust Fund allocated accounts are already rolled-over to the next fiscal year if those funds have not been expended.

Every fiscal year, as required by law, the City is required to anticipate employee costs and commit funds for those costs. Since 2008/2009, the Library has experienced a reduction in force due to unanticipated lay-offs, retirements, and general turn-over. When new staff are hired, it takes an average of three months minimum to replace a vacant position, resulting in unanticipated salary savings. New staff have been hired-in at lower salary steps, hourly rates, and benefits rates than their predecessors, resulting in further unanticipated salary savings for that fiscal year. Salary savings cannot be

used for any other expenditure except for personnel costs until the final reckoning quarter of the fiscal year.

It would be unreasonable to change the City's policy of returning unspent allocated annual operating funds for one department and not for the others. Additionally, allowing a department to roll over unspent allocated operating funds could result in deficits or unfunded needs in other departments, and hamper efforts to direct available funds to priority functions.

Conclusion

The City appreciates the time and attention the Jury has devoted to generating the findings and recommendations contained in the Report.

If you should have any questions, please contact City Manager Jeffrey Epp.

Sincerely,



Mayor Sam Abed



Deputy Mayor John Masson



Councilmember Ed Gallo

Councilmember Olga Diaz



Councilmember Michael Morasco



Jeffrey R. Epp, City Manager

cc: Alan I. Baskin, Foreman
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